



Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham Testimony on AB 1

Madison Metropolitan School District Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham shared the following testimony at today's Assembly Education Committee Hearing on AB 1.

"Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you. My name is Jennifer Cheatham, and I am the superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District.

"Along with my testimony, I am sharing with you our district's Annual Report and most recent Quarterly Review of Progress. We are incredibly disciplined about reviewing our progress at the school and district level and reporting publicly on it, because we take very seriously being accountable to our community. In fact, the development of stronger internal accountability systems is one of our district's major priorities.

"Every school in our district develops a public school improvement plan aimed at measurable goals for student outcomes, and crafted with input from their school community. Every school closely monitors their progress along the way. Every school also reports out on their results at the end of the year.

"I think that all of us can agree that state level accountability systems are also important. This system ought to provide parents and guardians across the state with information on school status and progress and it ought to ensure that interventions occur when a school is not performing well. Every child deserves to attend a school that is capable of meeting their needs. While we share that belief, the bill before you today does not yet represent accountability that supports our efforts to meet the needs of every child.

"We have several concerns about the bill, but chief among them is that it does not support our most struggling schools in charting a true path to improvement. If a school is failing or struggling, we believe we have a responsibility to students, families and community members to make meaningful change. We need to not only require that these schools do what we know works in education, and we know quite a lot, we need to provide the resources necessary to implement those practices well.

"There is no evidence that charter conversion produces consistently better results for children. In fact, the results are very mixed across the country. Rather than supporting schools with the strategies and resources they need to improve, this bill relies on something we have no evidence will lead to real improvement.

"In addition, requiring the creation of independent charter schools will have a real impact on state aid for every public school district in the state. Even if Madison has no schools that are labeled as failing by this bill (and I can tell you that no matter what is passed, that we will be working hard to ensure that is true), we would still see a reduction in aid to our district if independent charters are created anywhere else in the state.

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“So even if we meet all of the expectations set out in this accountability bill, we could still be penalized with a loss of state aid—taking away precious resources from our students and families.

“We have several other concerns with the bill – that it would allow multiple tests that would not fairly compare schools across the system, it would assign letter grades that do not fairly communicate how a school is performing and will inevitably lead to reactive strategies, and it would remove control from our locally elected school boards.

“As I’ve said, I respect the need for a stronger accountability system, but it is clear that many parts of this bill need more thoughtful consideration before it should be passed. Rather than rush to pass a flawed bill, I would urge you to work with school districts to develop an accountability system that supports our efforts. We would welcome that opportunity. Thank you for your time and consideration.”

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